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ABSTRACT

In the 1950s, Puerto Ricans in the United States began to consolidate to gain more political power, and over the next three decades, many organizations were formed for this purpose. The National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights (NCPRR) was created in the early 1980s to become a mass-membership, activist, civil and human rights organization. Through grassroots coalition-building with blacks and other groups, the NCPRR addresses problems relating to the economic, educational, social, and political status of Puerto Ricans. The governmental and industrial sectors which historically have been the primary source of jobs for Puerto Ricans are declining. Only 40% of all Puerto Ricans over 16 are now working, and Latinos as a group are highly subject to underemployment, family poverty, low educational attainment and a high dropout rate. About one-third live in physically inadequate or overcrowded housing conditions, and their health status is also low. The Puerto Rican community has been harmed by the Reagan Administration's reduction of government spending on social programs and lack of support for affirmative action, as well as the current rightwing political climate. Puerto Ricans must continue to develop the power they have displayed in recent elections. (KH)

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*The Status of Puerto Ricans in the United States**

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I Introduction

We believe that each generation has a responsibility to those who came before it and to those who will come after it. Early generations of Puerto Ricans in the U.S., our grandparents, our mothers and fathers, laid the foundation for us. They created self-help institutions and organizations to deal with the harsh realities of life in the "land of opportunity" and to represent our concerns to the larger society. They wrested a foothold first in New York City, later on in other Northeastern cities and in the central midwest. They came to this country to work, and so they fought for jobs. And when they had them, they fought to unionize. They built our communities—from the bottom up—from the grassroots.

*A report commissioned by the Board of Directors of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights (NCPRR). Written by Richie Perez for presentation at the Third National Puerto Rican Convention, June 1, 1985, Philadelphia, PA.

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This report is dedicated to the Puerto Rican pioneers who built our communities, to the proud Boricuas who continue to struggle for our advancement as a people, and to our youth—who face an increasingly difficult situation in America.

We hope this document on the status of Puerto Ricans in the United States will deepen a collective understanding of our situation and contribute to the further development of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights as a unifying and fighting force for the civil and human rights of all Boricuas.

II Brief Overview of the Movement for Puerto Rican Rights

From the "hometown" and neighborhood social clubs, to the political organizations like Hermandad Puertorriqueña, organized in 1923, Puerto Ricans came together and organized themselves to preserve their culture, to fight discrimination and achieve equality, to make their voices heard on both domestic and international issues, and to insure better lives for their children.

In the 1950s, more than 80% of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. were concentrated in New York City. This era saw Puerto Ricans trying to maximize their power by attempting to unite grassroots, social and hometown clubs into "federations." A few Boricuas were trying to build independent power bases in political clubs and were fighting their way through the traditional party structures into appointed jobs and a few elected positions on the city and state levels. A small, younger, college-trained group forged still another base for defending and advancing the community through the development of organizations like the Puerto Rican Forum, ASPIRA, and PRACA (Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs).[1]

The militancy of the civil rights struggle contributed to the development of new organizations, like the National Association of Puerto Rican Civil Rights, formed in 1965. The subsequent development of a federal anti-poverty apparatus in the nation's ghettos also opened up new opportunities. Many began to explore the possibility of using the anti-poverty structure, with its resources, programs, and jobs, to increase the strength of grassroots groups and the fighting capacity of the community as a whole. Others, unfortunately, saw merely an opportunity to control these groups for their own personal advancement. Too often, the federal government selected this type of individual to deal with and promote as a "community leader."

Later, we would learn through experience that social agencies which depended on government funding for their existence would be restricted in their ability to speak and act forcefully against government or societal policies that held back Puerto Rican progress.

In the 1960s, the nation was put on notice that growing anger and justified impatience in the Black community existed in the Puerto Rican com-

munity as well—Boricuas too were demanding change, opportunity, equality, and justice. This message was raised in demonstrations, marches, and riots in scores of Puerto Rican communities. As the decade ended, an explosion of militancy among Puerto Rican youth in the nation's barrios and colleges carried this message once again.

Leading the barrio movement were organizations like the Young Lords Party, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party and El Comité, who consciously identified themselves with the radical tradition in Puerto Rican history. Leading the protests on the campuses were sons and daughters of Puerto Rican workers who had come into college as a result of the community struggles for special admissions programs in the mid-1960s; most were the first in their families to go to college.

These students made important contributions. They formed campus groups, fought for Puerto Rican Studies and expanded admissions policies, reached out to high school students, and linked themselves to the issues facing their people. They rejected the idea of college as an "ivory tower" and embraced and acted upon the belief that "You are a college student for 4 (5 or 6) years, but you are a Puerto Rican all your life."

Most of the militant Puerto Rican activists of this period rejected the ballot box as a vehicle for change, but this continued to be an area of considerable activity for other sectors of the community. Three basic approaches to electoral participation emerged in the 1970s. The first, best symbolized by the career of Herman Badillo, continued the struggle of Puerto Ricans within the Democratic Party. The second, best characterized by the career of Ramon Velez, was to use the anti-poverty programs as a political base. (By the late 1970s, most of the elected Puerto Rican politicians in New York City had previously served "political apprenticeships" in anti-poverty agencies.) In the late 1970s, a third approach also emerged, marking the entrance of Puerto Rican community militants into the electoral arena. The forerunner of this approach in New York City was Gilberto Gerena Valentín, a radical activist for more than three decades.

In the early 1980s, the formation of the National Network in Support of Vieques and the Committees Against Fort Apache contributed to bridging the communications and coordination gap among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. These nationwide efforts were the immediate forerunners of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights and contributed greatly to shaping the favorable conditions for the forming of the NCPRR.

Origins of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights (NCPRR)

Thus, as we entered the 1980s, the Puerto Rican community had generated a complex organizational life and political practice. As we noted at the Founding Convention of the NCPRR in 1981, the Puerto Rican people were now spread across the nation, concentrated mainly in decaying urban centers, and wherever we were, we were struggling for our democratic rights.

At any given moment, Puerto Ricans around the country are engaged in literally scores of struggles. Most are defensive actions against established institutions (i.e., response to hospital or daycare closings, unemployment or dropout increase, media racism, police brutality). Yet although many of the issues are similar, if not the same, grassroots Puerto Rican groups and activists in different locations, until now, have rarely shared experiences and learned from each other or coordinated their efforts.

Usually, ad-hoc local groups or loose coalitions of organizations and individuals of varying ideological positions are put together to fight issues as they arise. This style of organizing has been accurately characterized by the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños as a "high cost mode of political action that takes a heavy toll on individuals and the meager resources that the community controls. It reflects real limitations in our midst."

The NCPRR was formed to address this situation—to find the ways to unite the threads of our people's struggles and increase our coordination in order to increase our impact, to bring together old and new groups and organizers, to unite us with our history. Our membership itself comes out of the many community battles we have mentioned.

From its inception, the NCPRR affirmed: We are building a mass-membership, activist, civil and human rights organization. We will learn from our people's history and will reach out to unite concerned Boricuas of different views, with different organizational focuses and tactics. We will work to unite our efforts based on the belief that *everyone* has something to contribute to our freedom struggle. We will strive to build a progressive Puerto Rican presence nationally by speaking and acting on all issues that impact on our people, and we will contribute to our people's collective capacity to resist their worsening conditions and to advance our historical movement for equality and justice in the U.S.

As we complete the first half of what the media has labeled the "Decade of the Hispanic," we need to take a close look at the political and economic reality within which we must realize these goals. WE ARE THE CONTINUATION OF OUR PEOPLE'S HISTORY—OUR ACTIONS TODAY WILL BE OUR PEOPLE'S HISTORY TOMORROW AND THE LEGACY WE LEAVE FOR *OUR* NEXT GENERATIONS. While the goals of total equality of rights, equality of opportunity, and equality of treatment remain the same, we need to understand the context within which we must today achieve these goals.

III Puerto Ricans in the United States

Geographic Concentration

There are more than 2 million Puerto Ricans living in the United States. The U.S. Census reports 2,013,945, but Puerto Rican community leaders and academics estimate the real figure to be closer to 3 million.

Puerto Ricans in the U.S. make up approximately 14% of the U.S. Latino population of 15 million. Although Puerto Ricans reside in every state, 75% of all Boricuas are concentrated in America's inner cities. *Our people's future is inextricably linked with what happens in the cities.*

The states with the largest Puerto Rican concentrations are: New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Florida, and California. In 1940, 88% of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. lived in New York City. By 1960, that number had dropped to 69%; and in 1980, 51% of Puerto Ricans lived *outside* New York City—but they had not escaped the discrimination, substandard living conditions, and second-class citizenship historically experienced by Boricuas in New York. Today, New York and New Jersey are home to 61% of the Puerto Ricans in the U.S., with another 6% living in Illinois.

We are a young community. Half our people are younger than 21 (median age is 20.7 years); and 75% are younger than 35. Only 3% of the Puerto Rican community is 65 years old or more. The youthfulness of our community indicates that we will be most severely affected by developments in the areas of education, employment, housing, and health care. At the same time, the youth of our people also indicates that our real voting potential has not yet been realized.

In seven states which account for over 80% of the Puerto Rican population (New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Florida) close to 40% are below 19 years of age. In the 25-44 age group (which studies have shown is the group most likely to vote), we find only 29% of the Puerto Rican community—compared to 40% of the general population.

Our dispersal and youthfulness means that we will constitute a voting majority only on local levels. Developing our skills at grassroots coalition building with Blacks and others who live in the same communities and cities is thus necessary if we are to put Boricuas (and others who truly represent our interests) into citywide, statewide, and national positions. We are tremendously encouraged by the recent stirrings of Puerto Rican electoral power across the nation. However, we are *not* encouraged—we are angered by the situation within which Puerto Ricans must continue to live and struggle.

Occupational Status

Historically rooted in the hardest-working, lowest-paid, and most exploited sectors of the American working class, Puerto Ricans have always been fighters for and supporters of unionization. A 1979 AFL-CIO study of Latino membership, for instance, revealed that 30% of Latino labor is unionized, compared to 19-20% for the population as a whole. The study found that 25% of Latino hospital workers are union members. For Latino federal government workers, textile workers, and food workers—the

levels of union membership are 28%, 30%, and 53% respectively.

True to our historical legacy, Puerto Ricans continue to recognize the importance of unionization. However, while we make up close to 30% of the unionized workers in the AFL-CIO, only 5% of Latino men and .9% of Latinas are part of the union leadership and Latino participation in unions is discouraged in too many cases.

Nationally, almost 30% of Puerto Rican workers are categorized as "operatives, including transport" (factory workers and truck and equipment drivers). 19% are categorized as "clerical and kindred workers." Approximately 19% of Puerto Rican workers provide low-level services in hotels and restaurants ("service workers"). 5% are urban laborers (i.e., loading trucks, unskilled construction workers), and 1% are farm laborers. Approximately 3% are "sales workers."

The conditions under which farm laborers work are among the worst in the nation. In New Jersey, for example, thousands of farm workers slave in the fields for $3.35 an hour and do not receive any medical benefits. Seasonal laborers, they must often work 10 to 14 hours a day in order to earn the minimum annual wage that will enable them to collect unemployment benefits.

Only 10% of Puerto Rican workers are found in the skilled craft occupations. Less than 9% (8.9%), or a little over 34,000 workers are categorized as "professionals"; and less than 4% (3.7%) are in managerial or administrative jobs.

Clearly, Puerto Ricans have not been evenly integrated into the nation's economy. We are less likely to have white-collar and higher paying jobs and more likely to be in blue-collar and service work in declining industries.

A recent New York City study concluded that Puerto Ricans have been virtually excluded from expanding core industries and jobs (those that offer stable employment, higher pay, and opportunities for advancement). We are confined largely to lower-paying manufacturing work and service jobs. The study found that of 212 specific industries, only four had relatively proportional representation of Blacks, Latinos, and whites (commercial and stock savings banks, department stores, hospitals, and the telephone company).

According to the study, Latinos and Blacks were excluded from 130 out of 193 industries in the city's private sector. These industries which "historically have maintained barriers to minority employment," accounted for almost 60% of the private sector workforce, and were among the leaders in job growth. The industries from which we have been locked out were characterized by better pay, benefits, and job security, as well as established procedures for advancement.

In addition to discrimination, there are a number of structural factors that contribute to the concentration of Puerto Ricans in low-paying, dead-end jobs and the high unemployment in our communities. Among them are: automation and the elimination of unskilled jobs; the movement of many manufacturing jobs to non-union, "right-to-work" Southern states and to low-wage, poor nations in Asia and Latin America; restrictive unions that lock us out of many skilled, higher-paying jobs; inadequate educational opportunities; and continuing exclusion from government employment.

Today, the U.S. has entered a period of profound industrial and occupation changes, especially in its major cities (where Puerto Ricans are concentrated). Many Midwestern steel mills, foundries, auto plants, and other heavy industry are closing *permanently* with a chilling impact on all workers. Areas like Chicago, Lorain, Ohio, and Gary, Indiana, with relatively large numbers of Puerto Rican and Latino workers, are especially hard hit.

In Lorain, for example, U.S. Steel reduced its workforce in one mill from 12,000 to 3,000; a shipping concern closed totally; and Ford Motors is using robots to make more cars with fewer workers. The results are 25-30% "official" unemployment among the Puerto Ricans and Chicanos in Lorain, with community activists pointing to 50% as a more realistic figure.

Throughout the country, low- and moderate-wage, blue-collar and service industries are declining; these are the sectors which historically have been the primary source of jobs for Puerto Ricans. In addition, government jobs have been reduced substantially since the mid-1970s because of government cutbacks and attacks on affirmative action programs which might have increased access to these jobs.

Finally, a crucial aspect of the structural changes the U.S. economy is undergoing is that the kinds of industries that are expanding and the types of jobs that are being created (in sophisticated technology and communications, in financial services, insurance, and real estate) call for highly-educated workers at a time when we have the highest dropout rate and lowest rate of educational achievement in the nation.

Income of Puerto Rican Families

Using an employment to population ratio, rather than government unemployment figures (which show our unemployment rate at about 14%), we can get a better sense of not only those over 16 who are not working, but also those who have stopped looking for work ("discouraged workers")—our "real" unemployment rate. Using this measure, we find that only 40% of all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. older than 16 are working, compared to 50% of the Black population and almost 60% of the white population. A 1982 report by the Minority Rights Group stated that:

> "One out of every three [Puerto Rican workers] is jobless . . . . Amid the relative affluence of the U.S., Puerto Ricans are living in conditions worse than those of the Great Depression."

Latinos as a group are also subject to underemployment. A recent Ford Foundation study found:

> "Compared to white males, they [Latinos] are more likely to be intermittently employed, to accept part-time work when they would prefer to work full-time, and to hold marginal jobs or jobs in the lower levels of both blue-collar and white-collar employment."

Since the labor market is the prime determinant of income in the U.S., it is not surprising to find that Puerto Ricans are poorer than either whites or Blacks. According to the 1980 census, approximately 51% of Puerto Rican families in the U.S. have annual incomes of less than $10,000 (with nearly half of these families having incomes under $5,000). 28% of Puerto Rican families earned between $10,000 and $20,000. 13% earned $25,000 or more. (According to 1982 U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates, it costs $134,000 to support *one* child in the U.S. until age 18.)

It is important to note also that things are not getting better. The *income gap* between Puerto Ricans and the rest of the country continues to *widen*. In 1959, the median Puerto Rican family income was 65% of white family median income. By 1971, it had dropped to 57.9% of that of white families. In 1980, it was down to 54%.

In 1980, Puerto Rican families had the lowest median income of any ethnic group, $10,734 (compared to $19,917 for the general population). The situation in Puerto Rico was even worse, with a median income of $5,923, only 29% that of the U.S. general population.

While it has been generally acknowledged that compared to other Latinos, Puerto Ricans occupy the lowest socio-economic position, a recent study revealed that Dominicans, Colombians, and other Latin Americans who have come to New York City in the last 15 years, earned, on the average, several thousand dollars more a year than Puerto Ricans. The study found that despite *less* fluency in English, these groups had higher levels of educational achievement, more high school graduates, and higher labor force participation rates. According to the study, a key factor in the differences was the much larger proportion of Puerto Rican families that were headed by single mothers.

In 1980, 35% of Puerto Rican families in the U.S. were living in poverty, compared to 10% for the general population (and 61% for Puerto Rico). Four out of every ten Puerto Rican families in the U.S. are headed by single females, and almost 75% of these families live in poverty. Puerto Rican women in general have lower educational achievement levels, more restricted occupational choices, and lower (and declining) labor force participation rates (approximately 34%). When they *do* have jobs outside the home, they are concentrated in low-paying industries and are generally paid less than men. Families headed by women are forced to rely heavily on public assistance, public employment, and training programs.

A 1981 study by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund identified a number of institutional barriers to participation in job training programs for single female household heads. These included: unavailability of affordable childcare; scheduling conflicts with public assis-

tance agencies; focus on only job-readiness skills development and not on actual job placement; and a failure to develop job training and placement programs in non-traditional vocations.

Educational Status

At a time when employers are demanding even higher academic credentials, the 1980 census reported that only 39% of Puerto Rican females and 41% of Puerto Rican males living in the U.S. had completed high school. This compared to completion rates of approximately 66% and 57% for females and males in the general population.

The National Center for Educational Statistics found that 15% of Puerto Rican young people between the ages of 14 and 17 had dropped out of school (compared to 7% of the general population) and that the problem became more acute in the 18 to 24 age group.

In 1976, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported a 71% dropout rate for Puerto Ricans in Chicago, with almost 13% dropping out in elementary school. In 1983, ASPIRA of New York found an 80% dropout rate for Latinos and a 68% overall dropout rate for New York City high school students. In addition, ASPIRA noted that the unemployment rate in New York City for dropouts aged 16 to 20, rose from 53% in 1970 to 73%, illustrating all too clearly the continuing disappearance of unskilled, entry-level positions from the job market and the educational system's culpability in the enormous youth unemployment problem.

Among the systemic factors contributing to the high dropout rate among Puerto Rican students are: the virtual absence of viable bilingual-bicultural programs in the public schools; the schools' unresponsiveness to the students' cultural backgrounds; the continued use of IQ and achievement tests that are standardized on white, middle-class youngsters and are unfairly used to assign Puerto Rican, other Latino, and Black children to ability groups; the continued dumping of Puerto Rican and other language-minority students into special education, "slow learner," and EMR classes (educable mentally retarded); the failure to develop meaningful programs of instruction for children with special needs; the "self-fulfilling prophecy" of teachers who enter the classroom with low expectations and the belief that Puerto Rican children are "uneducable"; lack of bilingual and peer counselors; and the continuing lack of Puerto Rican administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals.

The small number of high school graduates, combined with increasing costs, racial "steering" of Latinos and Blacks away from higher education, and other administrative obstacles result in only a small percentage of Puerto Ricans making it into college. When we do, we are more likely than other groups to be in a two-year college and to drop out before completing our degree. Thus, if you go by government figures, approximately 55% of Puerto Rican youth graduate high school and are academically eligible to go on to college. Less than one-half of these will actually enter college. And of these, only 28% will graduate. So if we start with a hypothetical 100 Puerto Rican students, the best-case scenario has 55 graduating from high school, 25 entering college, and 7 graduating from college.

Among the victories of the Civil Rights Movement were the Bilingual Education Act of 1967, the establishment of ethnic studies and special college admissions programs, and expanded financial aid for college students. Collectively these and related programs were meant to address a situation where: language-minority children were denied the right to speak their own language and were penalized for doing so; received an education based on cultural and historical distortions; and were systematically excluded from higher education.

Today, under the disguise of "less federal involvement in education," the Reagan administration has stepped up its moves to eliminate these and other educational gains.

Today, attacks on bilingual education continue on all levels. Programs are being dismantled, cut back, and limited. A nationwide ideological attack against bilingual education is being led by Reagan supporters. One California-based group, "U.S. English," headed by conservative, former U.S. Senator S.I. Hayakawa, has proposed a constitutional amendment to establish English as the official language of the U.S. and to abolish bilingual election ballots. In San Francisco, with its significant Latino and Asian population, 63% of the voters endorsed the idea that only English be used for voting ballots and voting handbooks.

In terms of access to higher education and financial aid, Reagan's calls for cuts in Guaranteed Student Loans, changes in eligibility for Pell Grants, lowering the amount of federal aid students may receive, and cutting back college recruitment and support programs (like Talent Search, Upward Bound) will impact heavily on our young people and their families.

At present, Latino college students constitute only 3.8% of the nation's undergraduates; and very few Latinos manage to complete their baccalaureate degrees in the traditional 4-year period. The Reagan educational offensive can only *worsen* this situation.

The Housing Situation

Latinos are among the most poorly housed groups in the nation. An unpublished 1983 study by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) showed that about one-third of all Latino households lived in physically inadequate or overcrowded housing compared to 10% of white households.

At a national level, only about 15% of Puerto Ricans own their own homes, although this number is higher in Midwestern areas like Milwaukee, where 33% of Puerto Ricans own their own homes (compared to 58% of the general population), and Chicago, where 24% of all Latinos own their own homes (compared to 48% of whites and 31% of Blacks). The rental units in which Latinos live in these areas are far older, are more crowded than the average, and are more likely to be targeted for "urban renewal." Latino communities in Chicago, for example, are losing rental housing at a high rate due to demolition and conversion to condominiums. Between 1970 and 1980, the Puerto Rican areas of Chicago's West Town and Humboldt Park experienced the highest level of demolition in the city (9% and 7% respectively).

Lower income is a contributing factor, but cannot entirely account for the housing deprivation experienced by our communities. As the 1983 HUD study noted:

> "Blacks and Hispanics are twice as likely as whites to be either inadequately housed or overcrowded, even when they have similar financial resources."

A key factor contributing to our housing problems is housing discrimination—the refusal to rent to Latinos, to lend money to prospective Latino homeowners, the refusal to insure homes in Latino and Black areas ("redlining"). The *New York Times* reported in 1983 that:

> ". . . very little has happened under the [1968] fair housing law, which bans discrimination in the sale or rental of housing . . . Despite some inroads of middle-class blacks into the suburbs of major metropolitan areas, the vast majority of blacks and Hispanic-Americans remained in the central cities while new, virtually all-white enclaves sprang up on the suburban fringes."

Although the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968, no regulations guiding its enforcement were drawn up until the Carter presidency; and these were withdrawn by President Reagan in 1981. In 1980, HUD estimated that more than 2 million instances of housing discrimination occur every year.

In the meantime, Puerto Ricans, other Latinos, and Blacks remain concentrated in the central cities, faced with a deteriorating housing stock, a growing housing shortage, and rising rents. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, this situation was worsened by a wave of arson that ravaged ghettos across the nation.

By 1980, the South Bronx had become an international symbol of government abandonment and had lost almost one-third of its housing units. The Bushwick section of Brooklyn in New York City lost 25% of its housing units because of arson over a 10-year period. This process was repeated across the nation, with the most likely targets being areas with convenient access to central commercial districts.

From 1978 to 1982, 55 people, including 28 children, died in suspicious fires in Hoboken, New Jersey; and over 6,000 people were displaced. In Jersey City, 48 people died in suspicious fires during the same period. In Atlantic City, New Jersey, only a few blocks from the Resorts International Casino, there were 177 fires in a 20-block area of the Latino community over a four month period; and the population in this valuable real estate area dropped from 4,500 to 2,323 in three years. Arson has become

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National Coalition for the Homeless found that:

> "In the face of 18 months of economic recovery, there have been substantial increases in homelessness in virtually every section of the U.S. . . . more people have been displaced from their homes, more pleas for emergency food and shelter, and a large gap between the availability of shelter beds and the need for assistance."

In 1983, more than 33,000 legal evictions were carried out in New York City alone.

Health

Poor social and economic conditions in Puerto Rican communities contribute to poor physical health and emotional stress. The full extent of the health status is difficult to determine due to a lack of comprehensive national research. Beginning in 1986, however, basic findings from the first large scale health survey of Latinos will become available (the Hispanic Health and Nutrition Examination Survey which began interviewing in 1982). In the interim, a number of local studies are useful.

The First Forum on the Human Rights of the Puerto Rican Migrant Family, held in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1983, painted a bleak picture. It found that Puerto Ricans in New York (where almost half the U.S. Puerto Rican population still lives) had higher death rates from heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and cirrhosis of the liver than do the rest of the population. It also found that children under 15 years of age have proportionately higher death rates from bronchitis, influenza, and pneumonia.

Studies of El Barrio (East Harlem) in Manhattan showed the infant mortality rate to be more than 20 per 1,000 births, the equivalent of the infant mortality rate in Honduras. A 1978 study of the South Bronx found an infant mortality rate of 25 per 1,000 births, higher than Hong Kong. The American Friends Service Committee, which published the study's findings, labeled the South Bronx, "the Third World here at home."

In May 1985, the East Harlem Interfaith Welfare Committee, a coalition of religious and other voluntary agencies, found a sharp increase among the number of East Harlem residents who had no food or money to buy food at any one time during the year because of the cutting of public assistance rolls and social programs. In 1984, food emergencies (no food and no money for food) occurred at least once in 2,070 East Harlem households, of which 1,044 were households with children. According to the report: "More than 1600 households said they had to borrow, beg, or steal to obtain food."

The study concluded that the Reagan administration's budget cuts in social programs, including food stamps: " . . . have put families whose primary wage earner is without or unable to work at very serious risk for hunger, homelessness, or poor health."

A 1983 report prepared for the Second National Puerto Rican Convention organized by the NCPRR concluded that on the basis of studies in Boston and Newark, New Jersey, the following were among the most serious Latino health issues: mental health; substance abuse; environmental and migrant farm worker health; perinatal (death during pregnancy) and infant mortality; and Latina health awareness.

Concerning substance abuse, Puerto Ricans are concentrated in urban centers where social problems are most intense and where illegal drugs are most accessible. New York State's Division of Substance Abuse Services reports that 133,440 Latinos, roughly 9% of the state's known drug users are considered regular abusers of drugs. At least 80% of these are Puerto Ricans according to PROMESA, a bilingual drug abuse center in New York City.

The problem is found in smaller cities as well. The Bethlehem, Pennsylvania branch of Hogar Crea, Inc., a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center (headquartered in Puerto Rico) reports that "drug abuse is a very big problem here; the prisons are full of people being held in drug-related cases."

Much more data collection and research is needed on this problem and its possible solutions, including those outside the sphere of "traditional" medicine, like the acupuncture treatments pioneered by the Lincoln Detoxification Program in the South Bronx. In addition one factor that should not be dismissed is the relationship between unemployment and substance abuse and other health problems. One expert in this field points out that persistent high unemployment is consistently associated with a range of social "pathologies." He calculates that every one-percentage point increase in the national unemployment rate leads to 37,000 additional deaths, 920 suicides, 659 homicides, 500 deaths due to cirrhosis of the liver, 4,000 state mental hospital admissions and 3,300 additional state prison admissions.

A 1983 study reprinted by Planned Parenthood supported the findings of the research we have mentioned so far and also called specific attention to health problems affecting Latino children and adolescents (including malnutrition, upper respiratory diseases, lead poisoning, child abuse, and high rates of teenage pregnancy), as well as others which affected Latino adults including malnutrition due to low income, heart disease and high blood pressure, lack of obstetrical/gynecological care, high stress, death and injuries due to social violence, and workplace hazards.

It is appropriate here to also call attention to the fact that the rate of sterilization abuse among Puerto Rican women is the highest in the world, with 40% of the women between the ages of 25 and 44 having been sterilized.

It is also important to point out another grossly bad and deadly health problem found in our communities: the waste dumping. A March 1985 report by the Office of Technology Assessment revealed that there were 10,000 known toxic disposal sites around the country, but that with the government money allocated for toxic waste cleanup, it is "not technically possible to permanently clean up even 2,000 sites in less than several decades."

Another government agency, the General Accounting Office, claimed that there are "potentially" more than 378,000 hazardous waste sites." Much of this poisonous, cancer-causing waste is dumped in powerless communities, communities that are not controlled by their residents—like the Ironbound District in Newark, Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx, or the 2,400 acre toxic dump in Emelle, Alabama. Of the 812 toxic waste dumps on the Environmental Protection Agency's "national priority" list (of high risk sites), 301, about 37%, are in the Northeast (including New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania). 97 of them, 12%, are in New Jersey.

Finally, we should take note that at a time in history when the deadly, immediate and long term effects of chemical products and waste are still not fully understood, President Reagan's plan for "less government interference in the free market" has involved cutting the Council on Environmental Quality and crippling the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). According to one government study of OSHA:

> " . . . in 13 years OSHA has actually had very little effect in protecting workers from accidents . . . the agency has issued too few regulations under the Reagan administration."

Who benefits from this situation—where "regulatory agencies" do nothing? Surely not the workers at Pymm Thermometer Corp. in Brooklyn. More than half its employees and several of their children have been found to have mercury poisoning, but OSHA has not made the company clean up its factory even though it cited Pymm four times for violating federal standards. Surely not the residents or Rockland County who were showered with toxic fumes after a chemical plant explosion in Pomona, near Haverstraw, New York in April 1983. Surely not the thousands of migrant farm workers who are continuously exposed to, and are often sprayed from the air with pesticides.

IV America in the 1980s

The Puerto Rican people in the U.S. have never been an affluent group. We have always been among those suffering high unemployment and underemployment, earning low wages, living in substandard housing, and receiving inadequate, inferior academic preparation. This has been true in

years of so-called "prosperity" as well as during times of recession. This situation has been even further aggravated by the actions of the Reagan administration.

The Impact of Reaganomics on the Puerto Rican Community

The Reagan presidency has sharpened the lines of struggle in American politics by putting forward not *tactical* differences with past administrations—but rather a series of *policy choices* that are rooted in a consistent conservative world view that is redefining the role of the federal government. The issue is *not* one of choosing between minimal government or big government spending.

Reagan's 1980 campaign centered on his promise to balance the budget. He inherited a $60 billion deficit in 1981. By 1984, the deficit had more than tripled. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that by 1989 the deficit will grow to $248 billion.

Reagan has not reduced government spending. He has shifted the spending away from social programs to defense. This was a budgetary choice based on two key conservative beliefs: first, the need for an ever-greater military buildup and preparation for intervention abroad in order to counter perceived threats of "communist subversion"; and second, the belief that it is entirely appropriate, efficient, and possible to stimulate economic development through the domestic impact of federal spending in support of the military/defense industry.[3]

Reagan's cost-cutting measures are primarily ideological choices clothed in claims of economic efficiency. Consistently, the choices made benefit the corporate and private sectors.

During the 1960s, there was a widespread consensus, formed in a large part by the militant mass movements of the era, that the federal government had to override state rule in issues of concern to the poor and people of color and that national government had a responsibility to develop policies and provide direct assistance to help eliminate poverty and its debilitating consequences. This position has been rejected by the Reagan administration, which sees its goal as reducing the role of government in the domestic sphere.

The Reagan administration holds that the federal government's primary responsibility is to encourage economic growth in the private sector and that this growth will eventually benefit even the poorest citizens ("trickle-down" theory). The implementation of this policy has involved cutting domestic social-welfare programs, dismantling government agencies that were supposed to safeguard the interests of poor and working people, eliminating regulations aimed at protecting the health of the nation's workers and the quality of its environment, and instituting new tax programs and subsidies that benefit the wealthy and big business.

For example, in 1983, Exxon and other big energy corporations received research grants from the government amounting to $1.9 billion and enjoyed $4.75 billion in tax "incentives" to encourage oil exploration. Among the corporations that have made more than $1 million in profits but have used tax loopholes to not only avoid paying any taxes, but to actually get tax refunds are: General Electric, Boeing, Dow Chemical Co., Tenneco, Dupont, Martin Marietta, General Dynamics, Union Carbide, Dun & Bradstreet, RCA, Texaco, and Xerox.

On the other hand, from 1981-84, $110.2 billion was cut from people-helping programs. According to the AFL-CIO, the following were just some of the effects of these policies during Reagan's first term: 1 million needy persons lost all food stamp aid; 4 million people classified as "working poor" lost some food stamp aid; $4.8 billion was cut from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), affecting 1.5 million children; 700,000 children lost Medicaid protection in 1982 alone; 290,000 children lost services at community health centers; child nutrition programs were cut by 28%; 1.1 million children from low-income families lost free or reduced-cost school lunches; more than 700,000 young people were affected by cutbacks in low-interest loans for higher education; job training programs were cut by $7.4 billion (35%); and the rate of poverty in America climbed to its highest point in 17 years.

This was only a portion of what Reagan wanted to cut; and the President has promised to use his second term to continue what he calls the "Second American Revolution."

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 40% of the cuts in Reagan's 1985 budget were scheduled for programs which assist the poor, despite the fact that these programs made up only 10% of the overall budget and 19% of the domestic budget, and that they had already been the target of proportionately deeper cuts than the rest of the budget.

Among the cuts that impact severely on the poor—Puerto Ricans and other Latinos and minority groups, the elderly, and women with young children are the following: reductions in food stamps, nutrition programs, the special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children ("WIC" program); AFDC; funding for child care and summer food programs; Medicaid and Medicare; as well as the threatened elimination of legal services and all funding for emergency food and shelter programs.[4]

Civil Rights

The Reagan administration holds that racial and gender-based discrimination have for the most part been eliminated in the U.S.; its position is that today's primary civil rights problem is "reverse discrimination" against white males, caused by the incorrect application of past civil rights regulations.

In 1983, Reagan appointed Linda Chavez as staff director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Chavez led the Commission in reinterpreting civil rights and rejecting the use of numerical goals and quotas as a remedy for discrimination. In 1984, she cancelled a study of how cutbacks in student aid were affecting colleges with large Latino and Black enrollments; she said the study was beyond the Commission's "jurisdiction." Chavez continuously presented the issue of civil rights as if it were a debate over taking benefits from some groups to give to others, feeding into the growing resistance to addressing the particular needs of groups that have suffered discrimination historically.

On April 9, 1985, President Reagan made Chavez the head of the White House Office of Public Liaison. Chavez, who was groomed in public speaking for the Republican National Convention, will now be the highest ranking Latina woman in the White House. She will be working under the supervision of Patrick Buchanan, the recently appointed White House Communications Director, a hard-line conservative and former newspaper columnist.

Buchanan recently advised Reagan to veto the farm-relief bill and urged him to go on television to build public support for covert aid to the Nicaraguan "contras." He has reorganized the Office of Public Liaison, and its priorities will now be to utilize the media to gain support for the administration's legislative goals, and, according to the *New York Times*, "to improve the Administration's standing with various minority and ethnic groups." We can then anticipate an increase in media manipulation and the projection of Chavez as a legitimate spokeswoman for "minority" and women's interests.

Manipulation and intimidation of the media by the Reagan administration and its right-wing supporters has been increasing steadily. We include in this: General Westmoreland's "libel" suit against CBS; a CIA complaint to the Federal Communications Commission demanding that the agency lift ABC's license to operate its five T.V. stations because of an ABC report that the CIA planned to kill a gangster involved in illegal arms shipments; Secretary of Defense Weinberger's public charge that the *Washington Post* had given "aid and comfort to the enemy" after it reported on the spy mission of a space shuttle flight (the information had been released earlier). In addition, there are attempts by the right-wing group, "Fairness in Media," to buy up CBS stock in order, they say, to challenge CBS's "liberal bias," as well as other attempts to clamp down on criticism of the President and U.S. policies.

During the Grenada invasion, President Reagan imposed a two-day total news blackout and held 300 reporters on Barbados under U.S. military authority. Current attacks on the media as "un-American," "in the service of America's enemies," point to a movement to curtail freedom of the press at a time when the U.S. domestic situation is worsening and preparations are being made for intervention abroad.

At home, another key focus of the right-wing attacks has been against *affirmative action.* In 1983, the Heritage Foundation, an influential conservative "think tank" publicly joined the assault on affirmative action and recommended that the Reagan administration shift its top law enforce-

ment priority away from crime control to "civil rights." It urged an attack on the hundreds of existing affirmative action agreements designed to remedy discrimination in school admissions or in the hiring and promotion of Blacks, Latinos, and women.

In June, 1983, a Labor Department study found that affirmative action of the type criticized by Reagan, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and the right-wing, had been "highly effective" in promoting the employment of previously-excluded groups. In addition to expanding the hiring of minorities, the study found that minority group workers experienced greater upward mobility in companies that did business with the government and were thus subject to affirmative action requirements. This study was never published by the Labor Department, but it was reported by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. and by the *New York Times* on June 19, 1983.

Currently, the Justice Department, which is supposed to *insure* the enforcement of civil rights laws, is *initiating* lawsuits against existing affirmative action agreements. The Justice Department itself has not submitted goals and timetables for hiring and promoting minorities and women as mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. One affirmative action agreement the Justice Department is currently trying to overturn involves numerical goals for the hiring of Latino and Black firemen in Buffalo, New York. Ironically, the Justice Department is now trying to reverse a case it had brought years ago. The Puerto Rican Legal Defense & Education Fund is defending the Buffalo affirmative action agreement.

Political Climate

With the open ideological support of the President on many issues, the right wing in this country has experienced tremendous growth in the last years. *By virtue of their beliefs and goals, these forces work against the interests of the Puerto Rican people.* Among the various sectors of the right wing, we find:

- The traditional right (conservatives) is committed to the ideology of "competitive capitalism," free of government regulation and unionization. Strengthened by a growing base of think-tanks which refine and popularize right-wing views, they try to distance themselves from the extreme right and attempt to give their rightist ideology a legitimate intellectual base.
- The "New Right" is made up primarily of small business owners and professionals who feel government has overtaxed them, strangled their businesses with red tape, forced their children on buses to integrate the schools, and shoved sex education down their throats. They are organized into a network of mass-based organizations (PTAs, neighborhood groups) and increasingly utilize local referendums and initiatives (like Proposition 13 in California) to institutionalize their views. Their targets include: ERA, abortion, busing, the right of gay people to public employment, the teaching of evolution, and union schools.
- The religious right are politicized religious fundamentalists based in evangelical churches which they use as an economic and ideological base. They identify themselves as "pro-God," "pro-family," and "pro-American." They have used television effectively to raise funds and launch voter registration drives. Considered "fringe elements" a few years ago, leaders of the religious right, like Jerry Falwell, are now called upon as "respectable" commentators on news shows (eg. "Nightline")—another sign of the overall rightward movement in the nation.
- The openly fascist and military right wing, including the neo-Nazi KKK, estimated at about 10,000 dues-paying members, and the Order of the Underground, which calls for an armed right wing revolution to create a "white republic."

It is also important to be alert to the inroads the right has made into the Puerto Rican and Latino communities. First, some traditional Republican Party conservatives have joined predominantly Puerto Rican middle-class, professional groups in an attempt to promote their views more widely among upwardly-striving Boricuas. Their message (like Reagan's) is that "The Republican Party and Big Business are your friends, and you have a future in this corporate world and will benefit from the policies we propose." Clearly this is an option for only a few Puerto Ricans and not a strategy by which *our whole community will rise together.*

Second, during the last presidential campaign, we saw a handful of Puerto Ricans in New York City embrace this message and campaign for Reagan-Bush. They received press attention and some federal monies. The national Cuban community overwhelmingly voted for Reagan and a very vocal sector has been particularly supportive of U.S. intervention in Latin America.

Third, the religious fundamentalists have reached out to churches and to right-to-life (anti-abortion) groups in the Latino community.

Fourth, the influence of the right is also extended into our community through the media. Radio WADO gave total editorial support to Reagan. The right-wing Unification Church of Rev. Moon which publishes *Noticias del Mundo*, with a circulation of 48,000, has an editorial policy supportive of the right-wing agenda, and a pro-intervention bias in its reporting on Latin America.

Although this is only a brief view, it indicates that there is organized support for the Reagan administration within our own community and a continuing attempt to build and expand that support.

Another important aspect to be recognized in terms of the political climate in the U.S. is the open racial stereotyping and scapegoating of Blacks, Latinos, and other peoples of color. This, of course, is not a new phenomenon, but today has intensified and takes on added importance: as the government talks about the "deserving poor" (and by implication, the undeserving poor) and blames the cost of social programs for America's problems; as the government argues that discrimination against minorities has been eliminated, and the right-wing adds "and now they still want more"; and as the economy continues trapped in the worst decline since the 1930s and the competition for jobs becomes even more intense. These factors can only contribute to an attitude of resentment and hostility against us, and there is fertile ground for this, as an examination of our history shows, and a recent public opinion poll underscored.

A Roper survey in 1982 found *Puerto Ricans to be the second least desirable group in the United States,* out of a list of 15 groups. Only 17% of the persons interviewed agreed that Puerto Ricans were good for the United States. 43% said Puerto Ricans were bad for the nation, and 40% had mixed feelings or did not know. According to the study, Cubans were the least desirable group. The groups identified as good for the country by more than 50% of the respondents were the English, Irish, Jews, Germans, Italians, and Poles.

In recent years, this view that Puerto Ricans are social parasites who are bad for the country has been expressed more openly. In just the last two years, we have seen corporate mogul and Reagan supporter, J. Peter Grace, characterize the food stamp program as a "subsidy for Puerto Ricans." Mrs. George Bush described 50% of Latina women as "illiterates." Teamster president, Jackie Presser, characterized Puerto Ricans as "illegal aliens," who along with Haitians, Cubans and Mexicans threaten the security of the U.S. and are "unwanted."

Most recently, in April 1985, Thomas Coughlin, the NY State Correctional Services Commissioner added that Blacks and Latinos were the ones that committed crimes in the state—because of their lack of family structure.

The 20th Century Fund, in their book, *Puerto Rico: A Colonial Experiment,* extended these stereotypes to Puerto Rico and attacked Puerto Rican scholarship and political culture.

In Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1983, Puerto Ricans were confronted by a photographic exhibition which claimed to depict life in the Puerto Rican community, but only showed idle Puerto Ricans, hanging out of windows, on street corners, with huge families in dilapidated buildings. Puerto Rican community activists and leaders in Holyoke denounced the exhibit as portraying Puerto Ricans in a negative light. While the exhibit showed Irish, French and Polish residents of Holyoke building dams and working in the mills, the exhibit selected photos of Puerto Ricans which would conform to the stereotypical images institutionalized by the mass media.

These racist views are also reinforced constantly by the movies and television, which continue to limit Puerto Rican portrayals to hoodlums and prostitutes, people who only destroy, who never create, never contribute and never build.

A final note is important here. The factors we have identified thus far have a *cumulative effect;* and they reinforce each other. They contribute to an atmosphere that encourages physical attacks on Puerto Ricans with the attackers feeling their action will be socially condoned (just as the U.S. Ol-

mpic Committee ignored coach Bobby Knight's public racist slurs gainst Puerto Ricans and his assault on a Puerto Rican policeman and ap-ointed him coach of the 1984 U.S. Olympic basketball team).

In the last two years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of Black people attacked, beaten and killed by policemen and racist mobs, and a number of racially motivated attacks against Puerto Ricans and Latinos around the country (although most have not received extensive coverage by the media). Police brutality and racist violence are also part of he reality of Puerto Rican people in the U.S.—as is the response to his violence.

In 1983, 7-year old George DeCasanova was killed in Camden when a 19-year old white driver *intentionally* ran him down, telling passengers in he car that he had a point system for "knocking off niggers and spics." Despite testimony of witnesses, the driver was found not guilty of murder, out guilty of aggravated manslaughter.

Six months after the killing of George DeCasanova, 17-year old Roberto Ruiz stopped his bike on a dark Newark street lined by private homes. A man leaned out of a window and began cursing, and then he fired two shots, wounding the youth in the hand. The gunman turned out to be Anthony Daniel Imperiale, the son of the former head of a white citizen's group in Newark that in the 1960s carried shotguns into the Puerto Rican and Black communities. In this case, Imperiale Jr. was found guilty of a lesser charge, after the jury refused to accept his argument that Ruiz had been wounded somewhere else. He is now appealing the conviction.

In 1984, fighting broke out in Lawrence, Massachusetts between French-Canadians, Irish, and Italian residents and Puerto Ricans and Dominicans who now make up one-third of Lawrence's population of 63,-000. Long-standing hostilities, intensified by the closing of area textile mills, broke out into the open. During the two nights of fighting and firebombing, white youths chanted "Who's American? We are," "USA, USA, Go home, we were here first." White youths who refused to give heir names told the *New York Times* that the fighting was "strictly ra-cial"; and a businessman in his 60s told the paper, "It had to come. This used to be a good city, but you get all these Spanish people in here and 90% of them don't work. I think they're pushy people." Describing crowds of Latinos outside the welfare center, he added, "You never see a white per-son there."

The Lawrence city government responded by sending riot police into the Puerto Rican areas and denied any harassment or discrimination against Latinos.

In Lorain, Ohio, a 90-lb., mentally-disturbed Black woman was shot four times by police in front of a crowd of Latino, Black, and white housing pro-ject residents. In response to community outrage over this unnecessary shooting, the mayor appointed a citizen's review board, which existed for a year without meeting to discuss the case. El Centro, a community social services agency, took on the case and other police brutality cases and cir-culated a petition. The police chief responded by announcing he would be checking signatures on the petitions to see which people had police records. The case is now in Federal court. (Lorain is 14% Latino, with ap-proximately 8,000 Puerto Ricans and 2,000 Chicanos living there.)

In Cleveland, at the beginning of May, 1985 a Puerto Rican was shot by a policeman whose record shows he has shot 12 people in 9 years, killing 3 of them.

In 1984, 6,698 complaints of police misconduct were filed with the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board. 20% of these were filed by Latinos and 38% were filed by Blacks. In recent weeks, cases of police tor-ture of Blacks and Latinos with an electric stun gun have been revealed. Three cases of hit-and-run incidents involving police drivers have also come to light. And anger over the police shooting of 66-year old Eleanor Bumpers during a Bronx eviction and the beating death of Michael Stewart at the hands of transit police has still not subsided.

And this again is just a ***partial*** picture. It does not include the scores of other victims of police brutality and murder, like 18-year old Roberto Rosa, shot to death by a policeman in Paterson, NJ in March, 1985, after witnesses say he was kneeling on the ground. Nor does in include Danubio Reyes, a Dominican, who was beaten in his Manhattan home by policemen who continued to beat him inside Bellevue Hospital, holding him for more than 72 hours without telling him why he was detained. Nor does it include José Tamayo who was attacked in his car by 2 sanitation workers who called him a "spic" and beat him with a stick. According to *El Diario-La Prensa*, witnesses reported that police officers "responded with indifference when called to the scene." And finally, it does not in-clude the scores of victims of La Migra (the Immigration and Naturaliza-tion Service), like 24-year old Severo Carrasquillo who was beaten and arrested at Kennedy Airport when immigration police said he was an "illegal Dominican alien" despite seeing his Puerto Rican birth certificate.

In addition to these physical attacks, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos must also contend with violations of their civil rights in still other areas. For instance, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) has been working on a number of cases involving the right to use our language without being discriminated against. In 1983, three female office workers in New York City were fired because they spoke to each other in Spanish after their boss had set an "English only" rule in the office. The women fought and won their case, and the "English only" rule was rescinded. (Fortunately, the women did not have to rely on the New York City Human Rights Commission, which is responsible for inves-tigating job discrimination complaints. It has a backlog of nearly 1,100 cases dating back to 1980.) PRLDEF is now fighting a case in which the mayor of Elizabeth, NJ issued an "English only" rule for city workers. This case is still pending.

Militarization and Preparations for War

The unprecedented military build-up that is taking place in the U.S. today affects Puerto Ricans in other ways besides diverting money away from human needs.

Puerto Rico itself, which historically has been used as America's military outpost in the Caribbean, has been the scene of *increasing* militarization. Repairs and upgrading of military facilities have been tak-ing place throughout the island.

The Coast Guard has been enlarged. The U.S. National Guard in Puerto Rico has also been expanded and has been involved in activities in Hon-duras, as part of the U.S. build-up there to intimidate the Nicaraguan government and give support to the "contras." The National Guard is sup-posed to be a "home" guard, but the U.S. seems intent on converting it into a Spanish-speaking Foreign Legion in the Caribbean.

Military recruitment has also been expanded in Puerto Rico's public schools. ROTC continues to spread on the university campuses; and private military academies, mostly dominated by Cuban exiles, pro-liferate. Military recruitment is aided by the elimination of 30,000 jobs because of Reagan's cutbacks and an unemployment rate that remains permanently above 20%. (Today it is unofficially estimated at 40%, but is double that in different towns.)

Puerto Rico has also been the staging ground for massive military maneuvers and practice exercises. The invasion of Grenada was rehearsed on the island of Vieques in 1981, years before it was actually carried out. Given the fact that the U.S. cannot use Mexico or Cuba's air-space to transport military forces, the evidence strongly suggests that Puerto Rico is being prepared to serve as a springboard in the event of a U.S. invasion of Nicaragua or elsewhere in Central America. (In 1965, troops were airlifted from Puerto Rico for an invasion of the Dominican Republic.) Finally, it has recently been revealed that for years, the U.S. has secretly included Puerto Rico in its plans for the deployment of nuclear weapons—which probably means that nuclear weapons have already been stored at one or more of the U.S. bases on the island.

In the U.S., the military build-up and preparations for war also have their impact, especially on our youth. Today economic conscription has replaced the draft; we now have a "poverty draft," with Puerto Rican and Black youth with fewer and fewer life options open to them being *forced* to consider the army as their best option. Glossy armed forces media cam-paigns and patriotic movies that glamorize the military also contribute to making the armed forces "attractive." Add to this, the reappearance of ROTC programs in many high schools and you have a situation where our youth are being set up to become cannon fodder and bilingual shock troops for U.S. aggression. They are being prepared to accept war and to kill their brothers and sisters in Latin America.

On April 29, 1984 over 50,000 people of all political persuasions marched in Puerto Rico to protest the militarization of the island.

We stand with our people on the island and oppose U.S. aggression against our Latin American family.

V The Response of the Puerto Rican People

In the preceding sections of this report, we have briefly discussed the situation facing Puerto Ricans in the U.S. — but that is just *one part* of the story. The other part is the response of the people to this situation.

The harsh realities of the 1980s have raised some important considerations for most Puerto Rican activists and leaders. First, the socio-economic situation of the Puerto Ricans people is worsening. Second, dozens of social agencies and government programs geared to aiding the Puerto Rican community have been decimated by 5 years of Reagan cutbacks. Third, pleas to the "private sector" can be a stop-gap measure *at best*, but are not the answer; corporate and foundation giving will never be able to replace the hundreds of millions of dollars of federal social service budget cuts which have accelerated under Reagan. Fourth, the priorities being set and the choices being made by the government can only *worsen* our situation further.

Faced with these facts, the question of *political power* is placed squarely on the Puerto Rican agenda. If we are to change our situation, we must have grassroots organizations that engage in political action in our communities and in the nation. The goals of this political action must be: to develop institutions to safeguard our democratic rights and to defend and strengthen existing institutions that serve the community; to develop the ability to build unities with our friends and allies and to punish our enemies; and to develop the power to influence *national* policy in our favor.

Across the nation, the components of a movement for Puerto Rican political empowerment are being built—but they remain fragmented. Institutions like el Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños continue to provide important research to connect us to our history and to bring together Boricuas from around the country. Organizations like the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, the Latino Institute and the Hispanic Research Center continue to build the data base we need in order to analyze our situation and determine our priorities.

Grassroots organizations across the country continue their work of educating, unifying, and mobilizing the people in different spheres of activities.

In addition, there are thousands of concerned Boricuas who believe in the fight for Puerto Rican advancement in community groups, parents' associations, tenants' committees, in their colleges and schools, and at their jobs whenever possible. Our poets, artists and musicians feed our souls and keep our culture alive and developing. Today their ranks are strengthened by the new, young rappers and breakers who have transformed the rhythms and realities of ghetto life into new cultural forms that have had national (and international) impact.

However, the most significant developments in the process of building a movement for Puerto Rican political empowerment have occurred in the arena of electoral participation.

Stirrings of Puerto Rican Electoral Power

In just a few years, Puerto Ricans across the nation have amassed a wealth of experience in the electoral arena and have played an important role in events of national significance.

Perhaps the forerunner of the contemporary upsurge in electoral activity among Puerto Ricans was the 1978 community-based campaign to oust Philadelphia's racist mayor, Frank Rizzo, which registered thousands of new voters, mostly Blacks and Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican registration doubled to 10,000; and more than 60% of the Puerto Ricans voted to dump Rizzo. Spurred by the victory of the anti-Rizzo campaign, the Puerto Rican Alliance of Philadelphia was formed in 1979.

In 1982, Black and Latino voters gave Mario Cuomo the margin of victory he needed to become governor of New York State.

In 1983, activity in the electoral arena increased in Puerto Rican communities nationwide and significantly was often accompanied by increased militancy in the streets. In Philadelphia, Wilson Goode received more than 70% of the votes in predominantly Puerto Rican wards in his successful mayoral race; and 1983 saw the city's first Latino Democratic ward leader and the first Puerto Rican to sit on the Board of Education. Mayor Goode also appointed a Puerto Rican as Commissioner of Records. 7,000 new voters were registered; and the Puerto Rican community registered its largest turnouts ever in the primary and general elections. The community also mobilized successfully against a hospital closing and pushed forward its fight for a new high school.

In Boston, 70% of the Latinos voted for progressive Black candidate, Mel King, a significant showing in this racially-divided city and testimony to both the growing sophistication of Latino voters and the efforts of "Latinos for Mel King." 40,000 new voters were registered by the Rainbow Coalition formed to elect King; and a Latina won a school committee seat to become the city's first Latina elected official. In addition, a lawsuit filed by the Latino Political Action Committee forced a postponement of the primary and the redrawing of district lines to better represent the interests and potential power of the Latino community.

That same year in Chicago, 74% of the voters in wards where Latinos were the majority, voted for Harold Washington. 79% of Puerto Rican voters, 68% of Chicano voters, and 53% of Cuban voters supported Washington, who after his election appointed Latinos to citywide positions. It is generally recognized that the Latino vote "swung" the election for the Chicago mayor.

Throughout the country, these activities were repeated. In some cases, Latinos were elected to office for the first time as in Haverstraw, NY, the Pennsylvania State Legislature, and a Buffalo NY judgeship. In other cases, Latino candidates lost, but thousands of new voters were registered, the political clout of the community was increased, and the starting point for future campaigns was advanced.

In 1984, the historic presidential candidacy of Jesse Jackson injected new ingredients into the electoral considerations and consciousness of the Puerto Rican community, providing a vision of what American society *could* be if it were truly based on democracy, peace, and justice here and abroad; and calling for a multi-racial, multi-ethnic "Rainbow Coalition" of the poor, the disenfranchised, and those who have been locked out of the "American dream." The emergence of the Jackson presidential campaign, the call for a national "Rainbow Coalition," and the formation of active groups like "Latinos for Jackson" in New York City contributed immeasurably to the growing electoral momentum in our communities.

According to an exit poll conducted by the Midwest Voter Registration & Education Project, Jackson was preferred as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate by approximately 10% of the Puerto Rican voters, 9% of the Chicano voters, and 7% of the Cuban voters. The MW-VREP polled voters in: Chicago, Illinois; East Chicago and Hammond, Indiana; and Cleveland, Lorain, Youngstown, and Toledo, Ohio.

In New York, Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition's vision and unity call had a sharper impact on the Latino electorate. According to the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, approximately 33% of the Latino vote statewide went to Jackson. In New York City, "when only those districts where Latinos are a majority of the voting age population are analyzed, 37.5% voted for Mondale,, 11.7% for Hart, and 45.8% for Jackson."

Two points are relevant here. First, between 1982 and 1983 predominantly Latino assembly districts in NYC registered the largest percentage increase of registered voters—approximately 26%, compared to 15% for Blacks, 6% for whites, and 8% citywide. Latinos, however, remain the group with the lowest voter registration rate in New York City. 30-40% (depending on the district) are registered compared to 46% of blacks and 51% of whites. Second, although almost every Puerto Rican elected official endorsed Mondale, Jackson carried the districts of all these officials, indicating again the growing sophistication and independence of Puerto Rican voters in the city.

Important contributions to the task of increasing Puerto Rican electoral participation were also made by the recently formed National Puerto Rican/Hispanic Voter Participation Project, a non-profit, non-partisan organization which provided technical assistance to voter registration and education efforts in 17 cities in 5 states: in New York State—Albany, Buffalo, Amsterdam and New York City; in Pennsylvania—Lancaster, Bethlehem, Philadelphia, and Allentown; in Connecticut—Hartford, Meriden, and New Britain; in Massachusetts—Boston, Framington,

Holyoke, and Lawrence; and in New Jersey—Newark and Vineland. It is estimated that approximately 50,000 Latinos were registered through these efforts.

Regional efforts like the MidWest Voter Registration and Education Project and the National Puerto Rican/Hispanic Voter Participation Project can also aid us tremendously in building communications and coordination between Boricuas in different parts of the country—a key requirement for Puerto Rican empowerment nationally.

While much more could be said on this topic, let us end by calling attention to two important realities. First, Puerto Rican and Latino political empowerment will not proceed without problems; there are many in this country who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and who do not want to see us active in the electoral arena. They will do whatever they can to discourage us. In Lorain, Ohio, the mayoral election was *cancelled* recently because of the possibility that a Puerto Rican could win the race; the candidate also received death threats. In Chicago, Rudy Luzano, a Latino labor leader and staunch supporter of Harold Washington, was murdered after the general election. Today, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund is still involved in a redistricting case against the Chicago City Council, charging that the City Council remapped the city in such a way as to split up Latino communities in order to weaken the potential impact of the Latino vote.

Second, what we are now witnessing and helping to build is an electoral upsurge of a new type. It is not based on simply replacing one politician with another, but on electing politicians and building mass community campaigns that strengthen the independent organization of the community. Unlike traditional politicians, the progressive candidates which are emerging today do all that is possible to register, educate, and mobilize the community—unleashing the full potential and desire of the people for change. Unlike traditional politicians who see their role as buffers between the community and the real power-brokers, the emerging progressives are challenging the status quo, and seeking public policies that lead to the improvement of living conditions in American cities—not greater profits. Experience is also teaching that elected leaders will be ineffective and will be blocked without the support of community mass movements that are willing to fight for the transformation of our social and economic conditions as a people.

VI Conclusion

As we examine the status of Puerto Ricans in the United States in the 1980s, two facts become increasingly clear. First, the social agenda being pushed by the Reagan administration and its supporters does not represent *our* interests and is a step *backwards*. It is an attempt to reverse historical gains that benefited working and poor people and to eliminate specific programs that were designed to address discrimination and to improve the situation of Latinos, Black, and other minorities.

Hand in hand with this reactionary thrust at home is an aggressive, interventionist posture internationally as right-wing dictatorships from South Africa to South America receive the American government's support; and the groundwork continues to be laid for the sending of American troops into Nicaragua and El Salvador. We anticipate an intensified propaganda effort to convince Puerto Ricans to buy into this war hysteria, to enlist in the armed forces, and to send our children and loved ones off to war, to use our Latin features and our ability to speak Spanish *against* our neighbors in Central America.

The second important fact to recognize is the widespread resistance of the Puerto Rican people to the reactionary agenda being forced upon us. As we have tried to show, Boricuas from around the country and in Puerto Rico are engaged in battle, fighting for their democratic and human rights in every arena.

Puerto Ricans around the country are today fighting in the courts, in the streets, in the migrant farm camps, in the factories, offices, unions, and schools; and increasingly the fight for our democratic rights is being fought in the voting booth. Clearly, many of the issues we confront are not just "Puerto Rican problems," and reflecting this, we are also involved in greater efforts nationwide to coalesce with Blacks and other Latinos and to build unity with all those who are working for a society based on true democracy, equality, justice and peace.

The National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights believes it has a contribution to make to this process. We are one Puerto Rican people, fighting our shared oppression in its variety of forms; but it is becoming increasingly imperative that we link up. There should be no more cases of Boricuas under attack in one part of the country, fighting alone, with the rest of the Puerto Rican people *unaware* of the situation.

The bringing together of grassroots groups and people to support one another's efforts and to share resources, experiences, and lessons learned is one of the NCPRR's key goals. To this end, we are building national communications and coordination networks around bilingual education, labor and women's issues, non-intervention in Latin America, and other key issues. Increasingly, community and student groups in local areas are also being brought together. We have decided that we will not seek or accept government funding, so that there will be no limits placed on the activities we can engage in for Puerto Rican unity and progress.

Each battle we fight helps us develop our strength and identify new friends and allies. For instance, when the New York City chapter organized demonstrations to protest the statements of Teamster president, Jackie Presser (that Puerto Ricans, other Latinos and Haitians were a "threat" to the U.S.), it began a working relationship with Teamsters for a Democratic Union, increased our contact with rank-and-file Teamsters, including some of them joining the NCPRR, and expanded the overall network of contacts of the Labor Task Force.

When the NJ chapter became part of the community response to Dioxin dumping in Newark, it increased contact with health groups, assisted in the formation of Hispanos Unidos of Ironbound, and increased cooperation among residents of different nationalities. The work of members in Washington (the Washington Information and Resource Center) on the 1983 Washington March for Jobs, Peace and Freedom expanded the NCPRR's contacts with Black organizations and other Latinos as did the activities of the Philadelphia chapter in the 1984 mayoral campaign of Wilson Goode.

These are only a few of the NCPRR's activities in the last two years; it does not include involvement in countless local issues, presentations at governmental hearings, forums, cultural events, position papers, speak-outs, and demonstrations. But the more we do, the more people we meet, the more communities we link up with—the more we know has to be done.

We can envision a situation where Boricuas would have the awareness, the communications, and the organization that would enable us to strengthen a redistricting lawsuit in Chicago with mass demonstrations of support by Puerto Ricans from other cities, or a *coordinated* voter registration, education, and mobilization campaign or a *national* Puerto Rican women's conference, or a national Puerto Rican speak-out on police brutality, or support activities around the country for farmworkers' strikes, boycotts, or organizing drives. The possibilities are unlimited; and the potential is there—it is within our power to accomplish this and more.

We urge you to join with us to build the NCPRR as a grassroots, mass-membership, activist organization, uniting Boricuas around the country. Help us deepen the analysis presented in this report. Contribute to the movement to increase the level of collective understanding, communication, and coordination among Puerto Ricans, to increase our local and national impact.

Act now, and years from now, when the children ask, "What did you do during the 'Decade of the Hispanics,' when opportunities were being taken away from us?" we will be able to answer: "We came together. We stood up—together. We moved forward—together."

ENDNOTES

1. In 1960, there were only 2,500 college graduates among the more than 612,000 Puerto Ricans in New York City.

2. The term "Hispanic" lumps all persons of Latin American origin into one homogeneous group. It downplays the national, cultural, racial, and economic uniqueness of *each* group and often masks important differences in socio-economic status, problems, and progress. Wherever possible, we have tried to obtain this specific information, but in the instances where this was not possible, we have used the term "Latinos."
Also, when using Census figures, keep in mind that the U.S. Census has ***historically undercounted*** Latinos and Blacks. For example, in the *Hispanic Almanac,* the Hispanic Policy Development Project estimates a probable Census undercount of 11% in New York City, 12% in Chicago, and 4% in Philadelphia.

3. In April 1985, a Columbia University professor studied the choices that were being made in cutting billions of dollars from social programs and handing this money over to defense contractors. He found, for example, that the $100 billion being projected for the Navy's Trident II submarine and F-18 fighter programs could alternately be used to clean up 10,000 toxic waste dumps; and that the $12.2 billion targeted for the Army's Patriot ground-to-air missile system is the same amount that between 1982 and 1985 was cut from federal income and nutrition programs "that left 20 million people hungry among the 35.3 million living in poverty."

4. In 1970, 79,863 Puerto Rican families (24.5% of all Puerto Rican families) had to rely on some form of public assistance as a source or supplement to their income; figures are not available for 1980. 19% of all Latino households in 1982 received food stamps. 45% received free or reduced-cost school lunches; and 20% received Medicaid benefits. Eligibility is no doubt much higher than those households actually receiving benefits, and higher for Puerto Ricans than for other Latinos.

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